Ford C.I.A. Panel: Departure From Traditio

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 7—President Ford, in naming his first major study commission, the panel to investigate reports of illegal domestic spying by the Central Intelligence Agency, has made a sharp departure from past practices. Under Presidents Johnson and Nixon, Presidential study commissions on controversial subjects were composed of members from outside the Administration who were carefully balanced to represent opposing viewpoints on the issues.

News Analysis

President Nixon's Commission on Campus Unrest, for example, had a black Harvard student, Joseph Rhodes Jr., serving alongside the New Haven Police Chief, James F. Ahern, under the chairmanship of a former Pennsylvania Governor, William V. Scranton.

President Ford, in appointing the commission on C.I.A. activities within the United States, selected a chairman from within his Administration, Vice president Rockefeller, and seven members from the outside—men who have never been known for skepticism about the United States intelligence operation.

His action drew criticism from some members of Congress and from such groups as the American Civil Liberties Union, which contended that the commission "seems designed more to avoid a full public review than to facilitate one."

Administration officials, while denying this criticism, say privately that the President's selections were designed to avoid a common occurrenc of recent years—the runaway commission that issues findings or recommendations the President cannot accept.

President Ford and a small core of advisers who helped him with the appointments—Secretary of State Kissinger," Philip W. Buctien, White House Council; Donald Rumsfeld, Presidential assistant, and John O. Marsh Jr., Presidential counselor—were reported to have felt strongly that the central Intelligence Agency had such an important role in national security that it should not be damaged in the course of an investigation.

The decision, then, was to find members who held wide public respect but would not compromise the agency. Ron Nessen, the White HOuse press secretary, said Mr. Ford himself came up with most of the mes of those appointed.

With the Vice President, who is subject to White House control, as chairman, the commission can be kept under tighter rein than most commissions have been.

Some White House officials have asserted that a study of the intelligence agency, because of its secret involvement in nation security matters, commands a different approach than most other matters, and thus they insist that a less balanced membership is justified.

On the other hand, some believe that Mr. Ford may have instituted a new approach in Presidential study commissions, one that may not facilitate as open an inquiry as in the past but one that is less designed to raise doubts about the motives of the President in the long run.

In the last few years, Presidents have appointed "blue-ribbon" commissions to make studies and recommendations when the President did not know what else to do when confronted with an inflamed public issue. such inquiries followed the urban riots of the nineteen-sixties, campus disorders of the early nineteen-seventies, the assassinations of the nineteen-sixties, and the spread of public fears over rising crime and the use of drugs, among others.

The pattern was for the President to appoint, with great flourish, a balanced commission and to call for a thorough, impartial study. At the time, this would have the effect of assuring the public that something was being done, but when the study was completed many months later the President would sometimes find himself with conclusions or recommendations he could not accept politically.

President Johnson was piqued because the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders found no praise for his Great Society programs and called for ambitious new programs, and his Vice President, Hubert H. Humphrey, publicly repudiated the commission's basic finding that white racism was the root cause of the riots.

President Nixon rejected the main recommendation of his Commission on Campus Unrest that he "exercise his reconciling moral leadership" to bring peace to the colleges.

He condemned as "morally bankrupt" the report of the National Commission on Obscenity and Pornography, a panel appointed by President Johnson. And he disagreed with his Commission on Marijuana and Drug Abuse, saying he could not support the recommendation for abolition of criminal penalties for possession of marijuana.

In the view of many kno edgeable persons here, the C.I panel is not likely to come with findings or recommen tions Mr. Ford would feel co pelled to repudiate.

This belief was reinforced the fact that no member Congress was appointed to panel, a feature that marked most major Presiden commissions of the past. official White House expla tion is that a number of Se tors and Representatives w promising Congressional inv tigations before Mr. Ford co evaluate the need for an inv tigation following the alle tions of C.I.A. domestic spy disclosed by The New Y Times on Dec. 22.

In that regard, the Wh House is encouraging Congr to appoint a special House-S ate joint committee to make t study rather than leave t matter to standing committe that have had C.I.A. jurisd tion. No such panel has be established.

A further departure from t past is reflected in the separa studies by the two branch Congress in past years h tended to step aside on matte of urgent public interest a urge the President to appoi an independent, blue-ribb study commission with the a surance that members of Co gress would be represented a that there would be no confli ing investigations.

But recently, Congress ha begun to reassert its authorit and is less willing than in th past to look to the White Hous for leadership. On the sensitiv question of intelligence, a least, the Ford Administratio is not inclined to surrender it control. In the process, th chance for a Government-wid consensus is believed to be con siderably diminished.